

Message Text

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ORIGIN EUR-12

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R 281926Z FEB 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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E.O. 11652:N.A.

TAGS: ASEC UR

SUBJECT:RADIATION AT EMBASSY

1. DURING PRESS BRIEFING, FEB. 27, DEPARTMENT PRESS SPOKESMAN (FUNSETH) RECEIVED LARGE NUMBER OF QUERIES ON RADIATION PROBLEM. PRESS QUESTIONS CENTERED ON WHETHER ZWE-FEL WAS CONDUCTING RADIATION-RELATED TESTS, WHY DISPATCH OF DOCTOR NEEDED NOW, AND WHETHER DEPARTMENT CONSIDERED EMPLOYEE HEALTH WHEN CONDUCTING "INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES."

2. WHILE EMBASSY PRESUMABLY HAS FULL TEXT OF EXCHANGE FROM WIRELESS FILE, FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF KEY ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS:

A. I HAD A LOT OF QUESTIONS LAST NIGHT AND AGAIN THIS MORNING ABOUT A REUTERS ARTICLE THAT RAN LATE YESTERDAY AND RAN AGAIN THIS MORNING ABOUT 11 O'CLOCK STATING THAT WE HAD SENT A DOCTOR TO THE US EMBASSY IN MOSCOW. REUTERS REPORTED THAT HE WAS BEING SENT TO TRY TO DETERMINE WHETHER

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TWO CASES OF LYMPHATIC CANCER AND ONE OF ANEMIA WERE RELATED

TO THE SITUATION IN OUR EMBASSY.

AFTER REUTERS RAN THAT STORY YESTERDAY, I CALLED THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT -- DR. WILLIAM WATSON -- AND HE ADVISED ME AS FOLLOWS:
FIRST, DR. SAMUEL ZWEIFEL LEFT FRIDAY FOR THREE WEEKS OF

OF TEMPORARY DUTY TO PERMIT THE EMBASSY PHYSICIAN -- DR. THOMAS JOHNSON -- TO TAKE HIS ANNUAL LEAVE, AND NOT FOR THE REASONS REPORTED BY REUTERS.

SECOND, DR. WATSON TOLD ME THAT THE MEDICAL DIVISION HAS FOUND NO MEDICAL PROBLEMS THAT IT BELIEVES TO BE RELATED TO THE SITUATION AT THE EMBASSY.

THIRD, AS A MATTER OF POLICY AND PRINCIPLE, DR. WATSON REAFFIRMED THAT THE DEPARTMENT IS NOT GOING TO DISCLOSE OR DISCUSS INDIVIDUAL MEDICAL PROBLEMS OF OUR EMPLOYEES, WHEREVER THEY MAY BE.

B. FINALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO RESTATE AGAIN TODAY ON THE RECORD, AS I DID LAST NIGHT WHEN CALLED ABOUT THE REUTERS STORY, THE SECRETARY'S REPLY AT HIS FEBRUARY 12 NEWS CONFERENCE.

FIRST, THE SECRETARY SAID THAT THE ISSUE AT OUR EMBASSY IN MOSCOW IS A MATTER OF GREAT DELICACY WHICH HAS MANY RAMIFICATIONS.

SECOND, OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN IS THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF STATE DEPARTMENT AND OTHER PERSONNEL IN MOSCOW.

THIRD, WE HAVE MADE UNILATERAL EFFORTS TO REDUCE ANY DANGERS AND WE ARE ALSO ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS ON THIS SUBJECT.

C. (RE PURPOSE OF DR. ZWEIFEL'S TRIP) WHILE HE IS THERE AS THE ACTING EMBASSY PHYSICIAN, HE WILL BE CONCERNED WITH THE HEALTH OF OUR EMPLOYEES AND HE WILL DO WHATEVER TESTS ARE REQUIRED AS THEIR PHYSICIAN WHILE HE IS THERE.

D. QUESTION: BOB, SOME YEARS AGO THERE USED TO BE A PRACTICE OF THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH EMBASSIES IN MOSCOW POOLING THEIR MEDICAL RESOURCES AND THE AMERICAN DOCTOR TOOK HIS VACATION WHILE THE BRITISH EMBASSY DOCTOR COVERED FOR HIM. THEREFORE, A REPLACEMENT DID NOT NEED TO BE SENT IN FOR ANNUAL LEAVE. CAN YOU TELL ME WHEN THIS PRACTICE ENDED OR IF THIS PARTICULAR OCCASION NOW IS THE FIRST TIME THAT AN AMERICAN DOCTOR HAS HAD TO BE SENT IN FOR THIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PURPOSE?

ANSWER: I THINK DR. WATSON FELT, GIVEN THE PRESENT SITUATION IN MOSCOW, THAT OUR EMPLOYEES THERE WOULD FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IF THEY HAD THEIR OWN AMERICAN DOCTOR THERE.

QUESTION: WAIT A SECOND, BOB. GIVEN WHAT SITUATION IN MOSCOW?

ANSWER: THERE HAS BEEN A DISCUSSION IN THE PRESS ABOUT A

CERTAIN SITUATION AT OUR EMBASSY, WHICH WE HAVE DESCRIBED AS BEING --

QUESTION: YES, BUT I'M SURE THAT DR. WATSON DOESN'T SEND DOCTORS OVER THERE BECAUSE THERE WERE DISCUSSIONS IN THE AMERICAN PRESS.

ANSWER: THE DISCUSSIONS IN THE AMERICAN PRESS HAVE CONCERNED THE HEALTH OF THE EMPLOYEES IN MOSCOW.

QUESTION: WELL, BOB, I'M NOT ASKING ABOUT DISCUSSIONS IN THE AMERICAN PRESS, NOR DO I THINK THAT DECISIONS ARE MADE BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT BECAUSE OF DISCUSSIONS IN THE AMERICAN PRESS. I'M ASKING YOU WHAT SITUATION EXISTS IN THE EMBASSY IN MOSCOW THAT WOULD REQUIRE THE SENDING OF AN AMERICAN DOCTOR WHEN THAT HAS NOT BEEN THE PRACTICE IN THE PAST WHEN THE OTHER DOCTOR TAKES HIS ANNUAL LEAVE.

ANSWER: AS I RECALLED -- AND THE REASON THAT I RECALLED IT IS THAT WE HAVE NOT DESCRIBED, IN ANY DETAIL OR IN ANY SUBSTANCE, THE SITUATION THAT DOES EXIST AT THE EMBASSY -- THE SECRETARY HAS SAID ON THE RECORD THAT IT IS A MATTER OF GREAT DELICACY, WITH MANY RAMIFICATIONS, AND WE DO NOT FEEL THAT WE CAN GO BEYOND THAT.

E. QUESTION: BOB, WHEN YOU SAY THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF OUR EMBASSY EMPLOYEES IS OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN, IS THAT OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN WHEN WE PLAN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES? DOES IT REMAIN OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN?

ANSWER: WE AFFIRM THAT IN ANYTHING WE DO OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN IS THE HEALTH OF OUR EMPLOYEES, AS A GENERAL PRINCIPLE.

TO YOUR SPECIFIC QUESTION, BARRY, I AM JUST NOT ABLE TO GO INTO ANY DISCUSSION OF THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM IN MOSCOW.

QUESTION: WHEN WE PLAN OUR INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES IN MOSCOW -- AND, SURELY, EVERYONE KNOWS WE HAVE SUCH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACTIVITIES -- IS THE HEALTH OF OUR EMPLOYEES OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN?

ANSWER: FIRST, I AM NOT GOING TO INITIATE TODAY A DISCUSSION FROM THIS PODIUM ABOUT US INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. WE JUST HAVE NOT DONE THAT. SECONDLY, I WILL JUST RESTATE THAT, AS THE SECRETARY SAID, OUR OVERWHELMING CONCERN IS THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF OUR EMPLOYEES IN MOSCOW. INGERSOLL

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